WORLD CHRONICLE

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PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Erskine Childers, Retired Director
Division of Information, UNDP

JOURNALIST: Raghida Dergham, Al-Hayat, London
Ruth Pearson, Business Week Magazine
Judy Lessing, Radio New Zealand

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

WOMEN'S ROLE IN SOCIETY

Erskine Childers, former Director of United Nations Development Programme's Information Division, emphasizes the problems women face in the developed as well as the developing world. He advises women increasingly to enter politics even if that role has not been traditionally open to them and looks forward to the possibility of a woman as the next Secretary-General of the United Nations.

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VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Women are grossly under-represented in political decision-making. They are paid less than men in the job market and have less opportunities there. World literacy rates for women are only two-thirds of those for men, and violence against women in the family and in society cuts across all income and cultural boundaries. Ordinarily, such painful realities are quoted on T.V. programmes like ours by women fighting to change a male dominated world. But this time we thought it might be interesting to present a man who well understands and has long taken note. Before his recent retirement as Director of the United Nations Development Programme's Division of Information, Erskine Childers spent 22 years in the United Nations system in various advisory and information capacities.

He will be interviewed today at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Raghida Dergham of the Al-Hayat, London; Ruth Pearson of Business Week Magazine; and Judy Lessing of Radio New Zealand.

Before we begin our discussion, here's a report by our correspondent, Steve Whitehouse.

WHITEHOUSE: A typical work day begins in Cairo. Increasing numbers of women are joining the urban work force, not only in Egypt, but throughout the Arab World. In many parts of the region, women are stepping out from their traditional role as mothers and homemakers. They're taking up careers inconceivable to earlier generations. While women have always played a vital part in agriculture, even here their role is changing. Safa El Shimy is a Cairo University graduate who decided to go farming on land of her own north of Cairo.

EL-SHIMY: Arab women have become involved in all aspects of agricultural development. This is a new field and if Arab women participate in it more seriously, they will probably do a better job than men.

WHITEHOUSE: The experience of women from throughout the Arab world -- from leaders to workers and professionals -- was the subject of a meeting in Cairo recently organized by the United Nations Development Programme. It was a chance for the more than 150 participants to exchange views with women like Safa on issues of common concern.

EL SHIMY: I plan to discuss difficulties facing Egyptian women.

WHITEHOUSE: Activists from all 21 Arab countries discussed the role of Arab women in the 1990's. A general theme that emerged was women are increasingly going to be active in every aspect of the development of their societies. UNDP programme officer, Nadia Hijab, outlines the main challenges facing Arab women.

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HIJAB: Because the role of Arab women is not recognized, this leads to other important problems such as the lack of training, education and financial support for her development projects.

WHITEHOUSE: Things are changing, however. In Egypt, and many other Arab countries, women, such as this television presenter in Egypt, are increasingly visible. The camera too, is operated by a woman, previously the kind of technical job dominated by men. Papers presented at the UNDP conference looked at new fields opening up to women, such as technology, information, industry as well as health. Four days of discussions identified many areas of common concern. It enabled participants like Safa to gain a wider perspective on what women are achieving in the development of the region. Safa, with her farm and determination to find a new path in the modern world is an example of how many other Arab women will be striking out in new directions in the 1990's.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Childers, evidently things are looking up for women in Egypt. How different is the situation in many other developing countries - are women also making headway, or is the example we've just seen exceptional?

CHILDERS: I would take it that example is a little exceptional in the sense that it suggests that Safa had had quite a lot of education. Education has increased about a double the rate for women now as for their increase in enrolment of men. For example, now about 33 percent of women in developing countries do get into secondary school. But I hope it's understood what I am saying. That's only one in every three girls in developing countries who can even hope to get into a secondary school - not university - secondary school,

compared with one in every two boys in developing countries but that is an improvement.

LITTLEJOHNS: So even what we've seen about the situation in Egypt, perhaps the picture is not quite as rosy as it appeared?

CHILDERS: No, I wouldn't think so. I mean I hope we wouldn't have too happy a view of things. There are probably in a world population of 5 and half billion human beings, there are probably one billion poor rural women for whom there has been virtually no progress in the last 30 years. We are talking very large numbers of human beings who are women.

LITTLEJOHNS: Of course, that's the situation for women in the developing world, what about women in the developed world, there's a lot of discrimination against them too. Your country island has a woman President now and there are few other women leaders, presidents, a couple of queens but generally speaking, it's still a man's world.

CHILDERS: Oh, yes, very much. I think what one has to say about women in developing countries is that the problems facing them are not just the legal problems or the question of how far up the ladder they can get - whether they can get into parliament, for example. The problems are also a basic survival for these hundreds of millions of poor women I'm talking about. I mean, for example, if we look at mortality - maternal mortality - that is, the number of women per 100 thousand who die in giving birth to a child. Well, 290 women in developing countries out of a 100 thousand die, against 27 in rich industrialized countries. By the way, in Africa, it's 530.

LITTLEJOHNS: Out of how many?

CHILDERS: Out of a 100 thousand. So we're talking about a different range. It is still the total range of problems all the way to who can possibly get into parliament, who may be able to stand as presidents, etc. But for women in developing countries the spectrum is from survival itself upwards. Now it is not from survival itself upwards for women in the rich industrialized countries.

DERGHAM: So the awareness of these facts, are you satisfied with the extent that there is enough awareness to deal with these problems or do you think there is a failure on the part of the countries themselves, the governments or the developed world as well as the developing world in bringing about this issue which is frightening...

CHILDERS: I'm not at all satisfied. I mean one cannot be satisfied with an issue as fundamental as this in human, political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights, so one cannot be satisfied. I mean, I start from the position that this is an outrage and then I look to see what improvement there is. But there's no question that there is improvement. There's no question that women in developing countries with the help of women in industrialized countries and some help from the international development community have managed to battle their way towards greater awareness. There's no question about that. In the last 50 years, I think awareness of the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenants dealing with discrimination on the basis of gender - they have helped in the sense that they are powerful things for women to invoke - women and those men who will support them. Institutionally I think there's still a very long way to go. If you look at the number of women who get into parliaments, for

example. By the way, it isn't very good in the North, it isn't much better in the South.

DERGHAM: Let me go back to this clip that we saw a little earlier on television and it somehow made us a little optimistic about Egypt but I know the Arab world a little bit and I think first, this is an exceptional example that Egypt is more advanced in as far as women's activities - not rights necessarily because I think Tunisia is the most advanced country in the Arab world in as far as enacting laws to protect women. How much do we need of laws to protect those women? How essential is it? Is development more important than enacting laws to protect women?

CHILDERS: I think the answer, Raghida, is one of the horrible broad woolly answers is that we need everything and as in every other aspect of development, you know you find out that everything links with something else. You can't enter the problem at one place and solve it. To give you an example of what I mean. If women are going to be able to play what ever roles they wish as men claim is their right, then you're going to have problems of who can own land, not merely who tills it. In Africa, 80 percent of the food production is done by women, 50 percent of the livestock is cared for by women. Now, it's another question who's land they're doing that on. So there's law, you see but it is also at the same time, training. Women have all those roles in agriculture in Africa. It's men who still to a great extent get access to training in agriculture which is an obvious nonsense.

PEARSON: But when you are talking about who can control land, isn't it a matter of who has the financial capacity to own that land more than a matter of gender?

CHILDERS: You see there, now what you've done is, as it were, to point out again the links in the chain because then the question also is women's economic power precisely and the tremendous importance of providing credit for women in particular. I say women in particular. It is a general problem that has been grossly neglected in development models where the assumption has been based on Western types of banks. A small farmer needs at most a hundred dollars of a loan for a planting season. A small farmer cannot go into an orthodox bank and ask for 100 dollars. They would show him or her the door but women need the credit even more because they have no collateral. If they don't own anything, they have no collateral. So the United Nations as you know is stressing this. The International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNDP, UNICEF, UNIFEM and quite rightly. It is immensely important but it's just another way of saying that this is a complete circle of links and almost everything has to be tackled in some degree at the same time. You can't neglect it. It's perfect what you said, you see, I said, "land" and you said, "it means money", and I said, "training" and round we go.

DERGHAM: And I was saying laws.

CHILDERS: And you were saying laws exactly...

DERGHAM: Protecting women, for example, with their children.

CHILDERS: Exactly, Raghida, you see.

LESSING: And you also talk about politics, do you think we should encourage people, encourage women who have at the top level managed to get more education than their sisters to enter politics quite actively even if culturally it's perhaps not the thing to do in their countries?

CHILDERS: Yes, indeed. I think so very much. Where women have managed to get into politics and I would say, particularly in their own right, not because they're the daughter of somebody. The results are remarkable in the sense of the presence that they bring to bear and by the way, their capacities for analysis. And logic especially for longer term analysis. The women in countries that have significant representation in parliament have been able to go far further. So I think again, that's very important.

LESSING: Do you think this is because they bring up the children and they can see day-to-day, minute by minute what the future is about?

CHILDERS: I think so. I must tell you that I have found down the years of my work - I want to be careful but let me put it this way - I think that women in general are probably more likely to analyse a problem with its longer term and fundamentally nourishing elements than are most men. I am even hearing this in the public discussion on the Gulf crisis. The questions coming from women are more fundamental, more future looking and cause-looking not just the immediate short term Rambo stuff.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Our guest is Erskine Childers, Retired Director of the Division of Information of the U.N. Development Programme.

Mr. Childers, I was looking at this pamphlet "End Discrimination against Women" which refers to the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women which was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1979 and it mentions that it's the only Human Rights Treaty to affirm the reproductive rights of women. Does that mean that, for example,

countries that deny women the legal right to end a pregnancy are in violation of this Convention?

CHILDERS: If those countries sign it and ratify it - then not only that - but in point of fact, a woman who wishes to contest an act against her freedom of choice can take her government and her judicial process to law all the way to an international tribunal. That's the power of the United Nations Convention. Now it requires not just signing - it has to be ratified by the governments. Two steps.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you know how many countries have in fact ratified it?

CHILDERS: No, I don't at the moment. It's a progressive matter, you can get lots of signatures and then it takes years and years to get to the point of significant numbers of ratification because those are done by parliaments following long juridical examination and so on.

DERGHAM: Permit me please, Erskine to go back to the issue of women in wars, and women in armed conflicts, women in liberation movements. Are you personally - as I happen to have been a friend of yours for many years, you are the son of the former president of Ireland in 1973-74, and your grandmother ran arms into Ireland together with your grandfather so she played the role in the history of Ireland. If you take that issue of woman's role in as far as it is similar to your own grandmother's role versus women's role in wars as we see them now - let's say the Iraqi women in the Gulf war - do you see any parallels or are they totally disconnected and I'd like to discuss this a little further after you answer me?

CHILDERS: Well, I think first of all what is in common is, I hardly have to say it I hope, that women can be as brave as men when they are deciding to battle on an issue of fundamental principle. So let's just say outright that the nonsense that is talked about, it is nonsense. Are there parallels? Of course, far more than is recognized. Women have played roles in liberation struggles. Not just my grandmother. I mean some of my role models included Constance Markievicz who with a small band of teen-age boys and girls held a section of Dublin against British forces in the 1916 revolution and, by the way, later was appointed by Mr. DeValera as the very first woman Cabinet Minister in Europe. And hundreds and thousands of women play those roles. They're very seldom noted because again wars and revolutions are supposed to be things that only men do. So there again I think we have far more in common than the general picture dominated by men, men writers, men historians would bring out.

DERGHAM: But were you trying to say earlier that women's attitudes towards wars are different from men's attitutes towards wars?

CHILDERS: Yes.

DERGHAM: In what sense?

LITTLEJOHNS: Women are more peaceful. Is that what you're saying?

CHILDERS: Yes, fundamentally. You see, I've referred to revolutions for basic human rights. I think women are far more cautious and suspicious of the macho Rambo, let's-kill-them-all-mentality that is traditional in men the world over, of all cultures.

PEARSON: Pardon me. But would you think that it's possibly because women give birth and know the value of life? Would that affect it in any way?

CHILDERS: Oh, I think so, yes. It has to because for just as you said. One can't say it better. What we don't yet know is whether there are genetic forces in all of this. You know the whole area of how much is inherited in behaviour patterns is one of the most fascinating areas, most difficult to get at, of course, scientifically. But of course there is bound to be that more strong nurturing sense and sense of the value of preserving life. By the way, the value of preserving the ecology as well.

PEARSON: Would you say that if there were more women in the parliaments of the world, there would be fewer wars than following that?

CHILDERS: Yes, I think so. I want to be careful because I don't want it to be thought that I'm saying all women are peaceful. They are not. There was a recent woman leader who took her country to war and very happily did, so I'm not trying to suggest that at all. You then have to look at what types of women behave as men do in the macho sense and why they do so and obviously that's a strong patterning element. Women who have decided that they'd better work, live and act the way men do because it's a male dominated world. Our problem in trying to identify these behavioural patterns is to know how

women would behave - do behave - if they are not faced with that type of pressure and some of the studies being done now of, for example, Norwegian cabinets, where you have up to and over half of the Cabinet Ministers first of all as women and many others as genuinely pretty liberated men. There's where you can begin to try and find out this question of how "different" are women.

LESSING: I'd just like to go back. I'd like to develop this but I'd also like to pick up on something you said. You talked about the U.N. system. Do you think the U.N. system despite all the pretty words is all that useful for women?

CHILDERS: Yes, I think so. I think, at the point of setting standards, there is no question about it.

LESSING: But in practical terms. You take the UNDP, the U.N. Development Programme which you know very well. How helpful is the Development Programme in getting women to state what it is they really need to help them develop and help their families and their countries and so on?

CHILDERS: Becoming more helpful and I have to say that because there is re-orientation that has to take place among the still largely, in most parts of the U.N., male especially professional staff in the U.N. system. There are exceptions to it - the U.N. Fund for Population Activities which has the highest percentage, over 40 percent of professionals who are women and many of them running departments. So one has to qualify it but there is no question now that the word is out: Pay attention to women in development throughout UNDP, throughout all parts of it.

LESSING: Because the Environmental Conference that will be in Brazil in a year and a half from now, women play a great deal of a very large role in conserving the environment as well in development especiallly in agriculture. Are people listening to what the women have to say in the planning for that conference?

CHILDERS: Yes, I think they will listen more and more because one of the fascinating things that again doesn't get reported by a male dominated media structure in the world is that all over the world, there are non-governmental organizations springing up out of nowhere by women and led by women in such fields as environment and development. It's almost impossible to keep track of how many of them and they are particularly being either led by or very strongly developed by women and that will have an effect on the Brazil Conference without any question.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Childers, you are the co-author with Brian Urqhuart former Under Secretary-General of the United Nations of this book "A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations" which dwells in part on the system of choosing leaders in the Organization. This year, the Secretary-General's term expires, do you think that there's a chance that the next Secretary-General could be a woman?

CHILDERS: I certainly hope so. I think it is about time, to say the least. In the study that we did of 136 executive heads in the U.N. system since its beginning, one has been a woman - namely Dr. Sadik, * the Head of the U.N. Population Fund. Yes, I very much hope that that would be possible. I see absolutely no reason why it should not happen except the continued intransigence of men.

* Since the study referred to Ms. Sadako Ogata has been appointed Head of UNHCR.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Childers, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Our guest has been Erskine Childers, Retired Director of the Division of Information of the U.N. Development Programme. He was interviewed here at theUnited Nations Headquarters in New York by: Raghida Dergham of the Al-Hayat of London, Ruth Pearson of Business Week Magazine and Judy Lessing of Radio New Zealand.

I'm Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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